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CIA
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WASHINGTON

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., has moved to bolster the independence of the Defense Intelligence Agency from the CIA in secret amendments to a bill approved by the Senate, a congressional intelligence source said Friday.

The Defense Intelligence Agency is part of the Defense Department and Helms sought to diminish the civilian political influences of the CIA on its reports to the administration and Congress, the source said.

One congressional critic said Helms was injecting "the whole right-wing agenda" on governing the CIA. "It is an attempt to put politics into the administration of intelligence," the critic said.

CIA Director William Casey objected to a number of amendments to the bill that sets spending levels for the CIA and other intelligence agencies, a source said.

Casey and Helms discussed the dispute in a telephone conversation that ended abruptly on Wednesday, the source said. Helms indicated at first that Casey hung up on him, but said it was a misunderstanding.

CIA spokesman George Lauder said Casey and Helms had several conversations on the measure, adding, "I wouldn't want to characterize the conversations."

As for the legislation itself, Lauder said, "Our position is that Congress makes the laws of the land and we're obligated to obey them."

The Senate agreed on a voice vote Wednesday to accept the series of instructions to the CIA that Helms offered as part of the classified bill on spending and policies of the intelligence agencies.

The bill goes to a meeting of members of the Senate and House committees on intelligence and Helms's instructions could be knocked out in the conference.

Helms wants the Defense Intelligence Agency to have priority on reporting on matters involving military affairs, the source said. The idea is to avoid having this intelligence report altered by the civilian bosses of the CIA, the source said.

Helms was particularly concerned with the role of Stansfield Turner, director of intelligence under President Carter, in such dealings with the Defense Intelligence Agency, the source said.

The Defense Intelligence Agency was instructed not to work with the CIA in its annual publication on Soviet military power, the source said.

Helms is concerned that the CIA has played down assessments by the Defense Intelligence Agency on Soviet military strength and Moscow's capabilities to destroy satellites and launch a nuclear strike, the source said.

During a public session dealing with the bill Wednesday, the Senate passed another amendment that would require the CIA to prepare a report for Congress on whether the military forces of Panama engage in drug trafficking, human rights violations and gun running.